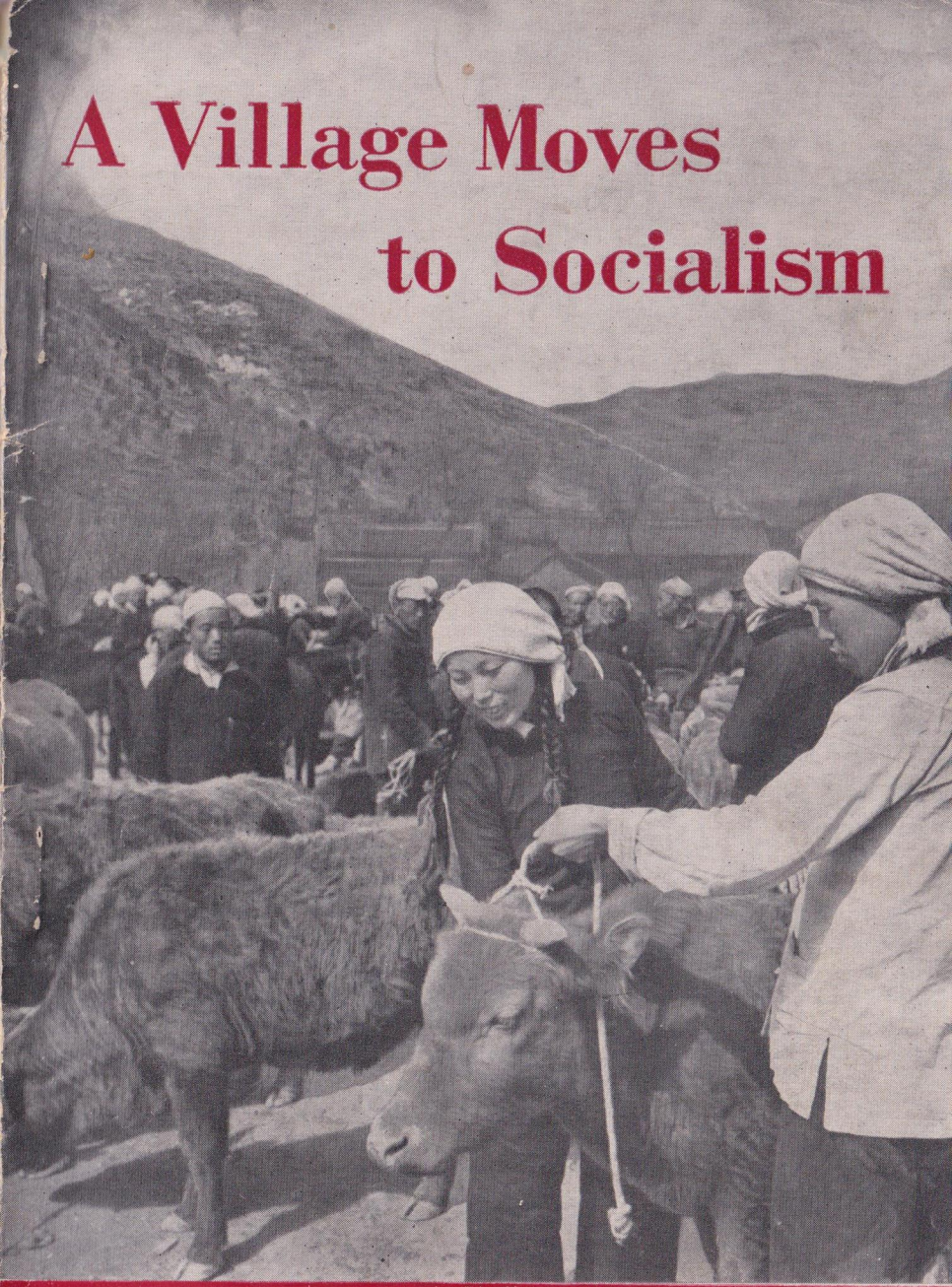
A Village Moves to Socialism



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A VILLAGE MOVES TO SOCIALISM

by

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PREFACE

THE VILLAGE OF HSIKOU is too small to figure on the map of China. It consists of tiny homesteads scattered over a steep hillside in the craggy Taihang mountains of Shansi province. It is like many thousands of other villages in China and throughout Asia. Its natural conditions, in fact, are worse than most: the climate is dry, the soil stony. Ten years ago, very few people outside Pingshun county, where Hsikou is situated, were aware that it existed.

Today, however, no village in China is more famous. Press, radio and films constantly bring news of what is going on there. The Chinese people know the names of many of its inhabitants as citizens of other countries know the names of film stars or football players. This is because Hsikou has been a pioneer, showing how peasants, in even the most poverty-stricken surroundings, can build a better life by their common efforts. Its story has a direct, intimate meaning for hundreds of millions of rural people.

That story is told in these pages. It begins with the peasants' first contact with new ideas, and their first challenge to feudal oppression and hostile nature. It goes on to tell how, after winning ownership of their land, they began an even more deep-going struggle to break free from ways of thought and work ingrained for many centuries. It ends with the village firmly set on the socialist road, out of poverty, to prosperity greater than many yet can imagine.

Just as Hsikou was a pioneer among villages, so Li Shun-ta, once ragged and illiterate, was a pioneer among its people. In this story you will read much of Li Shun-ta, now a member of the National People's Congress, the highest governing body of all China. First among the peasants of Hsikou, he saw the vision of socialism opened by the Communist Party, fired others with it, convinced them that, working on their own hillside, they could make it come true.

The author of this pamphlet has made two long visits to Hsikou, hearing what the peasants had to say of the past, the present and their hopes of the future.

During her first visit early last year, the villagers were still in a cooperative of the preliminary type. They owned the land individually but managed and farmed it jointly. They drew pay for their work and dividends on their investments. This was a half-way step to the socialist way of working. Under it they became better off than they had ever been before.

During her second visit the Hsikou people, again in the front ranks of progress, went over to complete joint ownership of land and tools. They became collective farmers, governed by the socialist principle that all means of production are owned in common. Work is the only source of income, and each person earns more or less in accordance with how much, and how well, he works. Their yields and personal earnings began to rise far above the levels they had reached in the semi-socialist stage.

Below is the whole story, as she heard and saw it.

A VILLAGE MOVES TO SOCIALISM

DARKNESS

LONG ago, the old men of the village say, there were no settlements on the hillside where Hsikou now stands. The peasants cultivated the valley at the foot, which used to be fairly fertile. But the rents there were so exorbitant that they could not live, so gradually they moved up the rocky slopes, where the land was cheaper. Building narrow terraces, they tried to scratch a living from the sandy soil. To make their hill-fields, they chopped down trees and bushes.

Once these had gone, there was nothing to hold the earth. Year after year when the rains came, torrents of water poured down, carrying everything in their path—soil, stones, sometimes houses and people as well. The worst havoc was done in the valley, which still lay untilled owing to the landlords' greed for high rents. Finally it became a waste of grey boulders and loose stones, looking like a dry river bed.

Battling with nature on their hillside, the peasants would build up layers of earth with their bare hands, then carry big stones one at a time to bank up the slopes into terraces. They would plant, hoe and weed; then wait, hungry and desperate, for the harvest. When the millet and the maize ripened, along would come the landlords to take most of it. The peasants lived in leaky huts, made of maize stalks smeared with mud. About these, they recited a grim little rhyme:

Big rain outdoors, small rain indoors
Stops raining outside, still drips within.

Almost every year, the villagers' food stores gave out before the next harvest. They had to go back to the landlords to borrow grain to eat. When the landlords collected the rent they

used a large measure, holding 20 catties. When the tenants borrowed food or seed, the grain was doled out with a measure holding only 16 catties. For money loans the landlords charged fabulous rates of interest. The accumulated debt of generations hung around the peasants' necks like an iron chain.

The people wore the same rags all the year round. They ate bran, elm leaves and husks to keep from starving. They had no human rights. When a young man got married, the landlord had the privilege of spending the first night with his bride.

To Hsikou village in 1930 came a thirteen-year-old peasant lad named Li Shun-ta. His father was an itinerant carpenter. His mother, with five children to feed at home, had sent the boy to Pingshun county, across the mountains from Honan province, where there was great pressure on the land. Shun-ta's uncle, his mother's brother, had already "emigrated" to Pingshun. His home too, it turned out, was crowded and short of food. Nearby Hsikou village, with only 20 households, had plenty of land, though poor. The uncle persuaded the landlord to rent some to the boy.

The 13-year-old tenant's plot covered just under an acre, supposed to yield 27 bushels of grain in a good year. Nine-tenths of this, it was agreed, would go to the landlord as rent, along with five sacks of potatoes for good measure. A message was sent to Li Shun-ta's mother and she made arrangements to join her son. Meanwhile, Li Shun-ta moved into a "home" of his own—three dark caves hollowed out of the hillside. The caves were vacant because their former occupant had committed suicide, in despair of making a living. All that winter, the boy waited for his mother to arrive, existing on borrowed food and gathering firewood to keep himself warm.

In the spring Shun-ta's mother, having managed to borrow money for the journey, came from Honan with his sister and two younger brothers. She and the four children all slept on the same ledge in the cave-house, beneath two tattered quilts. In the field, the mother pulled the wooden plough while Li Shun-ta guided it. They climbed all over the mountain to collect the manure dropped by the landlord's cattle, hoed until their backs were breaking, and somehow managed to live through to the harvest. When the landlord came for the rent, they begged him to be lenient because it was their first year. He replied coldly:

←≪ **Terraced fields along the Hsikou hillside where Li Shun-ta settled.**

"What you promised, you pay!" The grain was measured, poured into the sacks, and carried away. The family was left with 115 lb. of millet. Later came the collector of taxes. All the spare clothing had to be pawned to pay them. Besides, Shun-ta was forced, as the "man" of the family, to do three days a month free labour for the village headman, bringing his own food.

Two years later the boy became the head of the family in fact. His father, who had managed to come to see the family very seldom in Hsikou, died after a brutal beating by a rich employer. When the news reached Shun-ta's mother she fell ill with grief and could do no work for a time. The children gathered wild apricots and sold them. They were able to buy a little grain to keep from starving.

That was in 1932. The next five years were spent in the same grim struggle for existence. The boy grew to young manhood. He and his mother both worked hard, but it took all they could do just to keep body and soul together. This was the life of all other tenant-farmers in Hsikou and the neighbouring villages.

GLIMMERS OF DAWN

IN THE MEANTIME, big events were taking place elsewhere in the country. The Japanese militarists had invaded China's Northeast in 1931. They had met no resistance from the Chiang Kai-shek government, which used its troops only against the Chinese Workers' and Peasants' Red Army and the revolutionary bases in which the people led by the Communist Party had overthrown the landlord power and all the peasants had received land. In 1934 the main force of the Red Army, then based in southern China, broke out of Kuomintang encirclement and began its world-famous Long March. It carried the call for anti-Japanese resistance, and for government in the interests of the working people in town and country, through eleven provinces.

In 1936, units of the Red Army appeared briefly in Shansi. Though they did not come to Hsikou, the Kuomintang county authorities posted rewards of a hundred *yuan*, a big sum in those days, for "anyone who caught a Communist".

"There are 72 signs by which a disguised 'Red' may be detected," the Kuomintang officers said. "Watch for those who carry matches or coins, who wear a blue patch on black garments, who mend their clothes with red thread, whose waistband is made of two joined pieces of cloth, who have a flower design sewn on the soles of their cloth shoes . . ."

Li Shun-ta.

By these standards any poor peasant could be a Communist. Landless, hungry folk from Honan province were continually coming over the mountains into Shansi to look for a means of escaping starvation; it was an age-old custom in Honan to sew a flower-design on the shoe-soles. In the valley near the county seat, peasants were shot every day for this "crime". Actually, the Kuomintang did not care who was shot. It feared the awakening of the whole people, and it was the whole people it was trying to keep cowed by terror.

In the next year, 1937, Japan launched her all-out war to enslave all China, rapidly seizing Peking, Tientsin, Shanghai and the Shansi provincial capital of Taiyuan. The Communist Party reached an agreement with the Kuomintang to fight Japan together, and the Red Army in North and Northwest China was re-named the Eighth Route Army. Quickly it became the main force in the struggle of the whole nation against the invaders.

In the spring of 1938, the Eighth Route Army entered Pingshun county, which Chiang Kai-shek's forces, withdrawing from the Japanese, had left as a no-man's land. Li Shun-ta and other peasants stood on a hillside and watched a long file of soldiers coming along the stony valley. Some carried rifles, some had spears with red tassels shining like flames in the sun. They wore straw sandals, and each carried a roll of bedding on his back.

Pingshun county now became a frontline "Liberated Area" with a democratic local government. A "work-team", sent by the Communist Party, came to remote Hsikou village and called the

people together. One of its members, Kang Lo, a man of about 30, talked with the villagers about their life and work, their families, their relations with the landlords, the amount of land they rented and what they had to pay for it.

"The Kuomintang told you that we Communists think no more of killing people than of mowing grass," he said. "Now you have seen us for yourselves. Have we killed anybody? Our policy is to help the people. We've come to help you to organize, to keep out the Japanese, and to have enough to eat."

A Peasants' Union was formed in the village. Li Shun-ta, with many other land-poor peasants and farm labourers, joined it. They organized a people's militia unit to fight the Japanese, pledged themselves to stand together for a reduction of one-fifth in all rents, and a reduction of interest on all loans. This was in accord with the policy of the Communist Party which, in the period of the united front against Japan, had discontinued the division of landlord estates.

The landlords were scornful of these demands. The Kuomintang had retreated only thirty miles, and they felt sure it would soon be back. The peasants were uneasy. They knew that if the Kuomintang returned, the landlords would take harsh revenge on anyone who had opposed them. Some villagers said cautiously to one another: "We'd better not take risks. The sky may change!"

After the harvest, when the landlords came to demand the rent, many still paid the old amount. Li Shun-ta claimed the reduction, but his landlord threatened that if he did not pay in full, his uncle—who was his guarantor—would have to make up the balance. So he too paid up. Owing to lack of solidarity born of age-old fears, the attempt to reduce rent and interest failed that year. The local people's government did not force the issue. It knew that no gain can be solid unless the people themselves make it.

Another year went past. The Kuomintang did not come back. Once again the Eighth Route Army urged the people to stand up together against landlord extortions. "We are with you," they said. "If you all refuse, the landlords can do nothing." That year the government ordered that all rents should be reduced by a quarter.

When autumn came, landlord Kuo Chao-hai came to Li Shun-ta to collect the payment, in grain, for his land. Li Shun-ta offered him the reduced rent.

The stony valley.

"This year is not like last year," he said. "We are paying what the law says. You won't get any more."

The landlord would not touch the grain. He stood there undecided, while the peasants gathered around to see how the argument would turn out. It was gradually getting dark.

"All right, I'll take what you say!" the landlord finally said furiously.

"It's not what I say, it's what the law says!" retorted Li Shun-ta.

As soon as the laden donkeys had started off down the hills with their crestfallen master after them, the villagers gathered round Li Shun-ta.

"You've won!" they said excitedly. "He took the three-quarters rent! Did you see his face! If the sky changes, he'll eat you!"

"If the sky changes, I'll go with the Communist Party," said Li Shun-ta.

A few days later, the big landlord who owned most of the land in Hsikou turned up for his rents. But the peasants were ready for him. As soon as he came up the path and approached the first house, its owner, Sang Jung-ho, ran over to Li Shun-ta's place saying, "Come quick, Brother! He's here!"

Li Shun-ta went with him to meet the landlord. Seeing the big measure to weigh the grain hanging from the donkey's back, he said at once: "You've brought the wrong measure! Don't you know the regulations? We use the smaller measure now."

"What regulations?" said the landlord, pretending surprise. "I've just got back from my father-in-law's home in Hukuan. I've heard nothing about them."

"Hukuan isn't a Liberated Area," said Li Shun-ta, "but this is. We have our own government here, and this is its law. Do you want to go against the law?" And he turned to go.

"Stop a minute!" cried the landlord, catching at his sleeve. But Li Shun-ta brushed his hand off, saying "I'm busy!" and went away.

The landlord saw that he was defeated. He produced the smaller measure and took the legal amount and no more. Sang Jung-ho for the first time in his life was left with enough grain to feed his family till the next harvest.

The same thing happened all over the village. It meant a big change in the life of all the peasants. The change was a lasting one. The "sky" did not change. The people's government remained.

THE PEOPLE ORGANIZE

SOON afterwards, the military situation became serious. A number of villagers, Li Shun-ta's two brothers among them, enlisted in the Eighth Route Army to fight the Japanese. This left the village short of manpower for farming. The military situation was unstable too. While the peasants worked the land, a sentinel stood on the mountain top to give them warning if the enemy should approach. The invaders, though they never occupied Pingshun county permanently, made frequent hit-and-run raids.

The village militia, on its part, used to harrass them by crossing into their territory at night to cut telephone wires. Then during the day they would work in the fields.

Through all these times, Li Shun-ta's mother was a tower of strength to her own family and the rest of the village. When her two younger sons volunteered to fight, she applauded their decision, urging them to defend the gains the people had made. To help provide the villagers and the soldiers with clothes, and to enable the people to earn more, she cleaned up an old loess cave and started a school in which she taught a number of women to spin and weave. When a women's organization was formed in the village, she was unanimously elected to head it.

Li Shun-ta wanted to join up like his brothers, but the village head told him that good men were needed in the rear too, to increase agricultural output which was vital to the people's struggle. So he settled down as a farmer and, in 1940, got married to the 17-year-old daughter of a poor shepherd, also a native of Honan who had come to Pingshun to seek a livelihood.

Year after year, even in the midst of the war, the Liberated Area government reduced the rent. The spectre of starvation faded. The people had enough to eat. Their confidence in the Communist Party grew. Whatever it said it would do, it did. What it said would happen, did happen. In 1939, Li Shun-ta, with five other men in Hsikou, joined the Party. They could now see far beyond their own village. They knew they were fighting and working for the national and social liberation of all China.

In 1942, the war-torn northern provinces suffered the severest drought in seventy years. In the Japanese-occupied and Kuomintang-held areas, where the food shortage was aggravated by high rents, taxes and profiteering, countless peasants starved to death. Nature was no kinder to the Liberated Areas. But there the Communist Party organized the people to make sure that everyone got a share of whatever food there was. In Pingshun county, it was decided to borrow grain from the landlords and rich peasants. Li Shun-ta headed the committee formed for this work in Hsikou.

The landlords who owned the Hsikou fields lived in other, richer, villages. When the committee visited them, they all had the same answer to its request. "Since your rent reduction campaign," they said, "we don't have enough to eat ourselves! We have no grain. If you don't believe us, look for it yourselves!"

Though they had hidden their grain carefully, it had not occurred to them that the new spirit among the peasants had spread to their own hired labourers. These working folk had dug the landlords' secret caves and store-holes—and they told the peasants' committee where they were. So the hoards were uncovered very quickly. Leaving an adequate ration for the landlords and their families, the committee distributed the rest of the grain among the hungry, giving the landlords a receipt for the amount taken, which was to be paid back when the area had recovered from the disaster. Much of the grain was found to have gone mildewed—the landlords were willing to let it spoil rather than give it to the people, on fair terms, to save them from starvation.

That year, despite the drought, not one person starved in the whole of Pingshun county.

But there was another drought in 1943. It came on top of a more serious military and political crisis.

Chiang Kai-shek and his generals had abandoned even their previous half-hearted efforts against the Japanese invaders. They had turned their forces against the Communist Party and the Liberated Areas, which they subjected to a tight blockade. The Japanese militarists, not worried any longer by the Kuomintang, used the bulk of their forces to attack the Liberated Areas with unheard-of ferocity. They killed civilians, destroyed crops in the fields, and set villages on fire in what was called the "three all" (Kill All, Burn All, Loot All) campaign. The purpose of the terror was to break the back of the people's resistance led by the Communists.

The Liberated Areas lost much ground. They had to fight back, and feed the population and the troops, from a reduced territory. The Communist Party, as always, turned to the people, telling them the whole gravity of the situation, calling for a mass movement involving every man, woman and child, to increase production.

"We have an army that fights," Chairman Mao Tse-tung said in a speech at Yenan during this period. "We also have an army that works. . . . In order to support the war, to counter the 'three all' policy of the enemy and to relieve the drought, we can do no other than to mobilize the entire Party, government, army and people to fight the enemy on the one hand and to take part in production on the other."

At an early stage in the campaign, Li Shun-ta and the other Communists in his and the neighbouring villages met to discuss what could be done in Pingshun county. Returning to Hsikou, he reported to the peasants:

"Last year we managed because we borrowed the landlords' grain. But this year there are again people who face starvation, and there's no more grain to borrow. Our army needs food too — it is our defender. We must fight this drought in a new way. If we work together we can cultivate more land, and grow potatoes and turnips."

Then he outlined the method the Party recommended, the formation of "mutual-aid teams". Neighbours would plan and do their work jointly. Where a peasant had a small family and more land than he could till efficiently, others would lend a hand and get an agreed compensation in grain. Where a household had little land and more workers or animals than could be employed on it, these could work on other people's plots and earn an agreed amount that way. The teams could help till the farms of men away in the army, enabling them to defend the Liberated Area without worrying about things at home. No land or manpower would be wasted. Time would be saved. After taking care of the existing cultivated area the peasants, if the work was well organized, could go on to open up waste land. The crop on such land could be shared according to the work each man put in. Thus there would be more food for all.

Such were the principles of "mutual aid".

BEGINNINGS OF SELF-HELP

NORMALLY, farm work had always been done individually. It was only on rare occasions that several men had combined for a bigger job, such as helping one of their number to build a house, or digging an irrigation channel for common use. Or, occasionally, a couple of families might help each other for the most active period of the harvest, the one providing more manpower getting some sort of gift from the one with less. But now it was proposed to make this form of mutual help general, involve more people in it, and extend it from single jobs to the work of whole weeks or months. This was something new and involved many problems of organization and understanding.

The Communists in the village, who had put forward the proposal on behalf of the Party, undertook to be the first to try it in

practice. Six of them, headed by Li Shun-ta, formed the pioneer team, in which all their families also took part.

It was early spring and the first task was to manure the fields. The six families all worked together, moving from one field to the next. They finished far sooner than if they had worked separately. Then they moved up the mountain and began to clear a piece of derelict land that had no owner. After that, they decided to tackle an uncultivated slope belonging to one of the landlords. The team sent Li Shun-ta to get permission from him.

The landlord was still in bed. "What have you come for?" he growled. "There's sure to be trouble whenever you turn up!"

"You aren't doing anything to reclaim that land yourself," Li Shun-ta told him, "so you must let us use it to grow food. Otherwise you had better lend us some grain without interest. We're willing and able to work. The land's there. Why should we go hungry?"

The landlord knew that the policy of the Communist Party and the Liberated Area government was to put all land under cultivation. He knew the peasants could get backing and had to consent. Within eight days the team had reclaimed over an acre of waste land and gathered nearly 20,000 lbs. of fire-wood—simply

by working in an organized manner. The lesson was not lost on the rest of the village. In a few more weeks, ten other households had joined the team. The original team had planned to reclaim 5 acres of derelict land. The enlarged one, with the energy and confidence generated by the success of the pioneers, managed to clear and plough up 20 acres, previously unowned or borrowed from landlords, on which they planted potatoes.

But almost every day there was some battle to be fought against the old, every-man-for-himself ideas.

When it was time for hoeing, Ma Hai-hsing, one of the members, insisted that his land should be done early. He grumbled and complained until the others became angry, and a real rift in the team threatened. For the sake of preserving unity, Li Shun-ta put in an extra half day at the expense of his own land and got the job finished.

Six other men worked for two days without finishing the job assigned them because the ground they had been put to reclaiming was hard. They became disgruntled and had to be persuaded to stay in the group.

Yang Lai-fa was instructed to plough another man's land before his own. He worked for half a day and then, leaving the job half finished, took his donkey and went off to his own fields.

"But you're holding up the whole team!" explained Shun-ta. "How can we start the sowing tomorrow if all of the land is only half ready?"

"I never thought of that!" confessed Yang Lai-fa.

The mutual-aid team sank real roots only when its first results manifested themselves. The autumn after the formation of the team 2,000 bushels of potatoes were harvested from the reclaimed land alone. The grain crop was better too. Each household in the village ended the year with about 30 bushels of grain and 20 large sacks of potatoes — and this despite the drought! They saved enough labour in 1943 to enable them to reclaim another 6 acres of land for planting the following spring.

There was no doubt as to how it had been done. "If we hadn't got organized," said Lu Wen-chuan, "we'd all have starved

←— **Members of the Li Shun-ta mutual-aid team reclaiming waste land.**

and our bones would be rotting by now." Everyone began to value the team.

The next year, 1944, the mutual-aid team harvested over 300 bushels of millet from the newly-reclaimed land. After the harvest Li Shun-ta and his mother were elected "labour heroes" by the village peasant association. Then the best workers in the mutual-aid teams all over Pingshun county, about 300 of them, held a meeting to discuss their experiences. Li Shun-ta made a short, simple speech telling how mutual aid had helped his village. The meeting elected him "No. 1 Hero" for the entire county. A bright red flower was pinned on his chest, and he returned home leading the prize awarded by the county government——a big strong ox.

In 1945, Japanese imperialism was forced to capitulate. But there were forces which did not want the Chinese people to reap any part of this victory. Japanese occupation garrisons in Chinese cities were ordered by General MacArthur, then the Supreme Allied Commander, and by Chiang Kai-shek, not to surrender to the resistance forces led by the Communist Party — only to Chiang's troops. This had its effects even in far-off Pingshun county. When the People's Army, which alone had carried on resistance there, went to take over Changchih, the Japanese garrison did not lay down its arms but opened fire. In the ensuing siege, Kuomintang units under Shansi provincial warlord Yen Hsi-shan, which had done no fighting in the latter war years, treacherously swooped down and hit the People's Army in the back, and entered the town to join forces with the enemy. The People's Army, after regrouping, returned to rout both Yen's soldiers and the Japanese, who were now fighting side by side. In this way Changchih was liberated.

Nearly all the able-bodied men of Hsikou went to help the People's Army in battle. It was just harvest time. A fierce wind was blowing over the mountain, threatening to blow the ripe grain flat. Li Shun-ta and his mother got all the old men, women and children to speed up the reaping. Beneath the distant roar of battle they worked to cut the maize and millet, starting with the crops of the men who were away fighting. When they got back, all the grain was safely in.

The reduction of rent had been proceeding year by year. Now that both the Japanese and the armed forces of Chinese feudalism had been driven out of the vicinity, it was time to deal with the extortions and sabotage of the landlords, who had tried in every way to evade the laws of the Liberated Areas. The Peas-

After liberating Changchih, the fighters return to Hsikou village.

ants' Association and the Communist Party called a huge meeting in the valley to which all the people came from miles around. The landlords were summoned to face the peasants, who stood up one after another and recounted how they had been forced to pay rents and interest in excess of the legal rate, and how they had been robbed and cheated. In the face of witnesses and proofs, the landlords had to admit the truth of the charges. They were presented with bills for the "settlement of accounts", which they had to meet in grain and land.

The peasants of Hsikou got an extra 50 acres of fields and 60 bushels of grain in compensation for what the landlords had robbed them of. From the end of 1945 on, they paid no more rent. The land they had tilled for so long became their own.

FIGHT FOR HIGHER YIELDS

FROM 1945, the Hsikou mutual-aid team became more and more famous all over the area. It was publicized by the Communist Party as an example of what could be done by organization. Mutual aid, now that the feudal landlords had been over-

thrown, was regarded as the key to the peasants' advance from the old methods of farming that had held back Chinese agriculture for hundreds of years. If mutual aid could succeed in getting increased yields and improving the peasants' life in Hsikou, where nature was so miserly, what could not be done elsewhere?

Li Shun-ta came to understand its significance, both for solving Hsikou's immediate problems and for helping all peasants see that their future lay in working together. Eagerly, he urged his team-mates to try out new methods of farming promoted by the Party and looked for fresh ways to increase production.

He was up against something of a barrier. Many villagers held to the old saying: "There's no short cuts in farming; only hard work counts." They clung to their old ways and it was difficult to budge them. In Hsikou they ploughed only once a year, in autumn. Shun-ta found that elsewhere they ploughed more often. He could get no one to try it until he had increased the yield on a small plot of his own by ploughing three times in a year.

At a regional conference of the most skilful peasants, he had heard of an imported variety of maize called "Golden Queen" which was said to give higher yields than the locally-sown kind. He wanted his team to try it but they held back, saying that it was "new-fangled" and might not be successful. When he planted his own land with the new seed, the results justified his daring. His yield per acre at the next harvest was 1,000 lb. higher than that obtained with the old kind.

The Hsikou peasants lost some of their conviction that their ancestors' ways were the best. They now had every incentive to produce more because they, and not the landlords, would get the benefit. The mutual-aid team formed a technical group to study the selection and treatment of seeds before sowing, the use of insecticides and other innovations.

Between 1945 and 1948, besides steadily increasing its yields of all crops, the mutual-aid team planted trees on 30 acres of hilly land and cleared an additional 85 acres for the same purpose. It bought new farm implements—including a plough and a harrow — and built up a common reserve of over 700 lb. of millet.

Life became easier. Li Shun-ta built himself a new house and dug a well so that the water would not have to be carried so far. His wife and his mother wove extra cloth and reared pigs for sale. By 1949 his whole family had new clothes and

bedding. In that year he was again elected the foremost labour hero in Pingshun for his leadership of the Hsikou mutual-aid team. He was presented with a testimonial written on a large board, which he fixed above the gate of his new house.

The War of Liberation, which had followed the Anti-Japanese War, was now over, and the last remnants of the Kuomintang armies were fleeing to Taiwan. One day after the 1949 harvest, a messenger came from the county seat with a letter for Li Shun-ta. The school-teacher — for the village had a small school now — read the letter aloud to him. It was an invitation from the Ministry of Agriculture of the new People's Republic of China to go, with other peasant representatives, to the North China Domestic Trade Exhibition in the great port of Tientsin.

This exhibition was one of many then organized to help restore and improve war-disrupted trade between the countryside and the newly-liberated big cities. Both agricultural and industrial products were shown. The peasants, many for the first time in their lives, saw manufactured goods for which they could exchange their grain and other crops. City manufacturers — state and private — got to know more about available supplies of raw materials, and about the higher new buying-power of a peasantry freed from landlord extortion.

Li Shun-ta returned to Hsikou full of the wonders he had seen. He had never been in a city before — and this one had a population of over two million. He had examined textiles that could replace the laborious village handicrafts, farm machines that could lighten the peasants' heavy labour and bring them prosperity.

What is more, from Tientsin he had gone to Peking, the capital of the newly-free nation. There he had visited the government's experimental farm which was using the most advanced contemporary methods to demonstrate the possibilities for Chinese agriculture. And, together with his group, he had seen and talked with Chairman Mao Tse-tung. Chairman Mao spoke to them warmly and simply commended their work, encouraged them to still greater efforts for production, and sent his warmest regards to everyone in their home villages. When they left, the peasants said to each other that they felt they had known him all their lives.

All this Li Shun-ta told to his fellow-villagers with great excitement. But he also found a situation he did not expect.

While he was away, some families had begun to think of withdrawing from the mutual-aid team and going back to the old individual ways of work. Mutual aid had been useful in wartime, they reasoned, because there had not been enough manpower. Now the revolution was won, they all had land, and the men were back from the forces, so they wanted to try to get rich on their own.

Li Shun-ta turned to the Party for advice and help. In May 1950, Li Lin, a young member of its County Committee, came down to the village. He talked to each of the twenty households in Hsikou — all mutual-aid team members — and worked out a comparison between their present condition and that before the war. Then he summarized his findings and called a meeting to read them to the whole village.

"I want to congratulate you, comrades," he said. "Before the war, as everyone has told me, the average yield of grain here was 180 catties per mou. But last harvest it averaged 321 catties. Before the war, out of the twenty Hsikou households, only two had enough to eat all the year round. Now eighteen out of them say they have spare grain, amounting to 18,200 catties altogether. Two families still have no surplus. But they won't go short of food either.

"Before the war there were eighteen draught animals in Hsikou. Now there are 39. There were fifty sheep and goats. Now there are 127. Between all the houses in the village there were only 66 rooms. Now there are 106.

"How did all these improvements happen? The chief reason is organization and learning to use better farm methods. If you stay organized, you go forward. The facts prove it. Working alone is a gamble: everyone knows that. It's risking what you have gained already.

After he sat down, an eager discussion broke out. "He's right," said Wang Szu-tse, who had been one of the poorest men in the village. "Look at me. I used to eat leaves and husks and live in an old leaky mud shack that you all remember. Now I've got a cotton-padded suit. I eat grain all the year round, and I've built three rooms where the rain never comes in. I couldn't have got any of it without mutual aid."

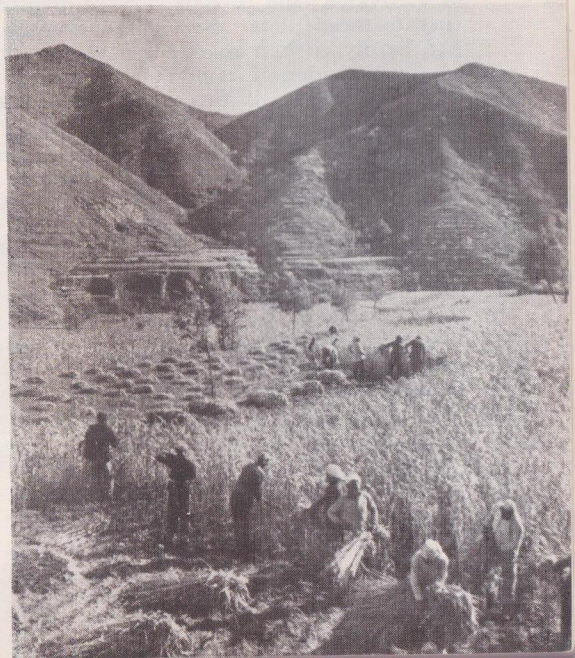
Li Shun-ta got to his feet. "You think we're rich now," he said, "because we've got decent houses and enough to eat and wear. But is this all we want? Don't we want our children to have something better? I've told you what we saw in Tientsin and Peking. There are machines that can make our work a hundred times easier and help us to produce a hundred times more than we can now. How can we use things like that if we go back to the old way of working on tiny individual plots? How can we buy them if we have no common fund?"

Nobody withdrew from the mutual-aid team. Instead, the members began to plan for still better yields, for a big increase in the number of livestock, and for a new programme of planting timber and fruit trees. Every advance made by the Li Shun-ta team, and others in different parts of the country, was publicized in neighbouring areas. This helped the number of mutual-aid teams to grow all over China.

NEW SUCCESSES; NEW PROBLEMS

IN February 1951, the Chinese people had already gained great successes in repairing the war damage to their economy, and a good part of the country's peasants had already received land. It was then that the People's Government issued a nation-wide call for increased agricultural production. The purpose, the government explained, was to provide a basis for the forthcoming industrialization of the country, of which the people had dreamed for a century. China needed heavy industry so that she could become strong and prosperous and provide a better life for everyone.

Li Shun-ta's mutual-aid team, already known far beyond Shansi province, responded by challenging all other mutual-aid teams to a production-raising contest. It pledged itself,



The mutual-aid team brings in the harvest.

by intensive cultivation and the use of new methods, to increase its grain yield per acre from 39 to 41 bushels. That was more than twice the pre-war level in Hsikou village.

This challenge, published in the Peking *People's Daily*, was widely reprinted. Soon Li Shun-ta began to receive hundreds of letters—from as far as Szechuan province in the southwest, Heilungkiang in the far northeast, Kwangtung in the south and Kansu in the west. In all these places, mutual-aid teams and model peasants accepted the challenge. Just as Li Shun-ta had done in the first place, they described the practical steps by which they hoped to raise their yields.

The movement snowballed throughout the land. Every day, word came of records smashed, of better results from new methods, of more mutual-aid teams organized. The contest was a big help to reaching the year's national output targets in agriculture.

As they worked to fulfil their pledge, the Hsikou peasants kept cursing their stony mountain fields. They began to talk about how, after the harvest, it would be a good idea to move to some place where the soil was better. They could set themselves much higher goals, they thought, if they were farming better land.

On the face of it, this idea seemed reasonable. The 80 acres of cultivated land in Hsikou were divided into no less than 2,700 tiny terraced plots. Some of them, the peasants said ruefully, had hardly enough room for a tractor to stand, much less work. Li Shun-ta himself couldn't see much future in Hsikou. He too began to wonder if they could find some place in the plains to move to.

About the time of the 1951 harvest, he went to Peking again. Model peasants from all over the country had been invited to witness the National Day parade in the capital and to attend the meeting of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the broadly representative democratic assembly that did the work of the National People's Congress, which was yet to be elected. On the eve of National Day, October 1, there was a great banquet. To his surprise and delight, Li Shun-ta found himself seated at Chairman Mao Tse-tung's table. As soon as the wine had been poured, Chairman Mao stood up, his glass in his hand. Everyone followed suit.

"Li Shun-ta," he said, "you have achieved tremendous results in some of the poorest conditions of the whole country. I drink this toast to you!"

Li Shun-ta's heart was bursting. "Here he sits in Peking with all the affairs of China to attend to," he thought, "yet he knows what's going on in our tiny village." Lifting his own glass, he replied: "Chairman Mao, I don't deserve your toast. Without your help and the help of the Party, I couldn't have done anything. When I get back, we'll do more."

Afterwards, when he was alone, he pondered: "Why did Chairman Mao drink a toast to me? He himself said it was because our mutual-aid team had got results in such difficult conditions. If we were anywhere else, we would not be an example to anyone."

From other conversations in Peking, Li Shun-ta understood that what was most appreciated about the work in Hsikou was its proof that even poor mountain land could give good yields. He also learned that the income from mountain farming could be much higher if grain-growing was properly supplemented by tree-planting and stock-breeding.

He told all this to the villagers on his return. He also gave other reasons against moving. "We've got a lot of mountains in Shansi province. What would happen if everyone who lived on them shifted to the plains! There would be no room for all anyway, and the hillsides would be left bare and unproductive. That isn't the way forward, for us or anyone else."

When the results of the competition were published, Li Shun-ta's team was able to announce that it had overfulfilled its promised target and obtained a yield of 42 bushels of grain per acre. On March 16, 1952, the Ministry of Agriculture put out a list of the best mutual-aid teams in the country. The Li Shun-ta team stood at the head of the list, and was given a substantial monetary award. From then on it was held up as a model for all the peasants of China.

The Hsikou mutual-aid team did not move. Instead, it took another step forward in organization and became an agricultural producers' cooperative.

FORMING THE COOPERATIVE

THE COOPERATIVE idea made headway in Hsikou because it was the best way to deal with the problems the mutual-aid team members faced, once they had decided to stay on the hillside.

The main problem was the number of small fields and the way they were worked. One man's plot was good for growing maize, another's better suited to millet. Yet every peasant needed both crops in his household, and wanted to grow both. Some building work, badly required for the benefit of the whole community, could not be carried out because individual households would not participate. For example, a water-duct was needed to improve farming in the place they called the East Valley. It would only take thirty days' labour to put it in. But the land belonged to eight different households and some were unwilling to have their land dug up. The rest had to do without water.

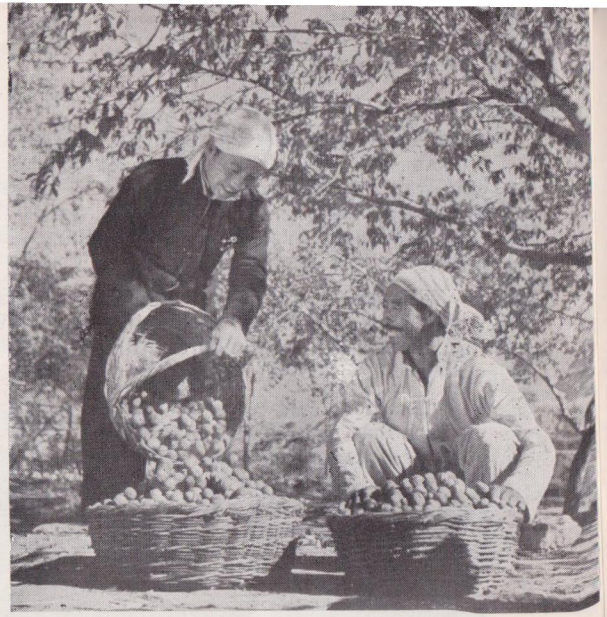
Such difficulties were inherent in the mutual-aid team system, in which people were working together but the land was not managed as one unit. They were beginning to crop up all over the country, and the Communist Party had already worked out the answer to them. It was to change over to an agricultural producers' cooperative.

The mutual-aid team had been a big step forward from individual farming because labour and tools could be used in the most effective way for several fields at once. The co-op was a further step ahead because, while fields remained individually owned, they too were pooled for the purpose of crop planning. In a co-op the members did not depend only on their own plots; they got their shares of the whole harvest according to the work they did and the land, animals, tools and labour they invested.

For the Hsikou peasants, the change-over held still another benefit: it would help them to do more afforestation and livestock-breeding.

Li Shun-ta and the other Party members began by explaining this to the others, stressing the advantages of a co-op over a mutual-aid team and finding answers to all doubts and questions. Nobody would be forced to join, they said. In the discussion, most of the villagers became convinced that this further step was in their best interest. Only a very few remained doubtful. As the idea of pooling their land did not appeal to them, they did not go into the co-op with the rest, but formed a smaller group of their own—still on the mutual-aid principle.

On December 10, 1951, the new co-op came into being under Li Shun-ta's chairmanship. It was given the name of the Li Shun-ta Agriculture, Livestock and Forestry Cooperative. It began its life with 26 households. Some were from Hsikou and some from the nearby village of Shatichien. Shen Chi-lan, an energetic young woman from that village, was made the deputy chairman. She was 23 years old and had been the leader of a mutual-aid team since she was 15. Very soon she began to prove her worth.



A large part of the farm's income is derived from orchards. The earnings from three walnut trees exceed those from an acre of grain.

To carry out its new plans for development, the co-operative needed more labour power. Shen Chi-lan undertook to win the women for organized work.

In the past there was so little land to till—in Hsikou the old average was less than a third of an acre per person—that women had never been called on to help out of doors except in specially busy times. Indeed, it was regarded as somewhat disgraceful for a woman to go out to work every day; her place was supposed to be in the house. Moreover, women's abilities were not highly regarded. Many of the men repeated the saying: "It takes a woman a day to do what a man could finish in the smoking of a pipe."

Shen Chi-lan was determined to break this prejudice. She ran up and down the mountainside on her long legs, talking to the women in their homes. But only a few of the younger ones came out to work at first. They had to endure ridicule from the men for their inexperience and clumsiness. "Look at the pheasants pecking beans!" the village boys teased when they saw the women stooping in the fields. To put a stop to such mocking, the women had to learn to do farming jobs as efficiently as men. Shen Chi-lan and two others from the cooperative went to a technical training class at the county town and, when they came back, taught what they had learned to the others.

Even after this, when the time came for the cooperative to begin hoeing, only seven women agreed to help. Shen Chi-lan had

set her heart on getting twenty. She thought to herself: "The woman who has suffered most oppression ought to be the one who wants most to change matters." So she went to see Li Erh-niu, a 49-year-old shepherd's wife, whose life had been so hard that now she seemed to care for nothing and spent her days moping in her cottage.

When Shen Chi-lan started talking about women's emancipation, Li Erh-niu looked at her dull-eyed. "What's the use of coming here?" she said indifferently. "I'm old. It's nothing to do with me."

"Auntie," said Shen Chi-lan earnestly, "look how worn-out your clothes are. You don't eat very well. Uncle looks down on you. He calls you names, and everyone knows he beats you. If you join the cooperative and work for it, you'll get grain of your own after harvest. You'll eat better, and Uncle will have to respect you more. It's because we are dependent on men that they think they can look down on us."

Li Erh-niu listened more intently, but would not promise to come out to work. She said she must ask her husband's permission.

The following morning Shen Chi-lan went to call for the few women who had agreed to accompany her to the fields. Suddenly she saw Li Erh-niu coming down the rocky path, a hoe in her hand.

"Hurry up!" shouted Shen Chi-lan to others. Auntie Li's here already. Let's go."

All day she worked side by side with Auntie Li and showed her how to use the hoe to the best effect. At sunset, the women came together to vote for the day's best worker. They elected Li Erh-niu because she had tried hard to learn, and done a good day's stint despite her age and inexperience. Shen Chi-lan asked the village crier to announce this news through his megaphone.

When the stay-at-homes heard him shouting, they said to themselves: "Why, Auntie Li is quite old! If she can become a labour model, I can surely do better than that." Twelve more women turned up the next day. In three days, the women's group had hoed 6 acres of wheat field.

So gradually the women learned to take their place in production. And, slowly, the men learned to respect them for it instead of laughing.

It was not until the harvest that the male co-op members were entirely won for the idea of equal pay for women. In the summing-up, it turned out that the women had put in 874 workdays, more than a third of the total. That was what had enabled the co-operative to fulfil its 1952 plans and gather a record harvest for its first year. Facts clinched the matter. The women had won their place as equals by hard work.

In 1952, the cooperative got an average yield of 41 bushels of grain per acre, almost twice the average yield for the district as a whole. On one particular plot they gathered 116 bushels

Women weeding. Li Shun-ta's wife is second from right.

of millet per acre—the highest ever heard of in the whole area. Besides, they planted nearly three thousand trees and increased the number of sheep from 185 to 600.

The few families that had remained outside the co-op and tried to continue as a mutual-aid team now applied to enter. So did one faintheart who had left the co-op shortly after its formation. It was clear now which way led forward.

Li Shun-ta received the Gold Star Medal of the Ministry of Agriculture for the achievements of his co-op in 1952. Only six of these have been awarded in all China.

LI SHUN-TA SEES THE FUTURE

IN 1952 Li Shun-ta set out on the longest journey he had ever taken. As one of a group of China's outstanding peasant leaders, he made a four-month visit to the Soviet Union. Li Shun-ta had always been a man with a vision. But what he saw of Soviet life and agriculture was beyond anything he had ever imagined.

Coming back home, he saw the familiar fields, rivers and mountains with new eyes, envisaging them as they would be in the future. As he peered through the windows of the bus on the last stage of his return trip, he was mentally planting the valleys with trees, looking out for the best point on the river to start a hydro-electric station. Approaching Changchih, which the villagers had once wrested from the Kuomintang, he glimpsed the lights of the new factories there and said to his fellow-passengers: "Look at those lights. There's coal and iron in this plain. We've everything we need for producing electricity and building really big industries. We'll have mechanized collective farms here before too long."

Starting for Hsikou the next morning, he found a group of people waiting for him on the roadside near another village, Yangchingti. They begged him to stay, if only for a short while. He sat down in the crowded house of his friend, the model peasant Wu Hou-li. Since Yangchingti too was hilly, he talked mainly about what he had seen in similarly-situated regions of the Soviet Union.

"They have collective farms in the mountains there," he related. "They rear sheep and cattle, and grow timber and fruit trees. The climate in parts of the Ukraine resembles ours. I've learned to do many of the things they've been doing—how to graft fruit trees on to other stock, for instance. They gave me a set of grafting instruments, and special seeds. Of course we can grow better grain and more of it, but what will make us rich is trees, sheep and cattle. That's the road to prosperity on this kind of land.

"The Soviet farmers," he went on, "work all the time to improve the strains of their plants and animals. The scientists help them to do it. Also, they vary their production. They keep bees and rear fish in ponds. I'm sure we can do all this too."

Li Shun-ta plays the gramophone he brought back from the Soviet Union for some co-op children. The two at left are his own daughters.

Just as Li Shun-ta's imagination had been stirred by what he had seen, so now he stirred each of his hearers.

"We're going in the right direction, planting trees and orchards," said Wu Hou-li. "The income from the fruit-trees alone will be three times what we now make out of grain. In ten or fifteen years, we can live as well as the Soviet peasants."

At Hsikou, all the village people came out with gongs and drums to welcome Li Shun-ta. It was harvest-time, so after escorting him home they went back to the fields to finish the day's work. In the evening they came to his house. He had spread out all the presents he had received for them to see—camera, gramophone, watch, blanket, suitcase, wine, cigarettes, toys for his little girls, a Ukrainian embroidered shirt, and so on.

After looking at all these gifts, they settled down to listen to his tale.

"The biggest thing I learned on this trip," said Li Shun-ta, "is that people can do anything they wish if they set about it the right way. I saw mountains that used to be as bleak and bare as

ours. But men planted forests there. Mountain peasants in the Soviet Union live no worse than those on the plains. They have electric light and telephones, piped water and warm, comfortable homes. They bought all these things with the money they got out of forestry and cattle and sheep."

"But they can't ever have been as poor as we are in Hsikou!" some-one said.

Li Shun-ta said he had visited places that used to be every bit as poor and backward. For instance there was the *Gains of October* collective farm in the Ukraine. "It started with 51 hectares* of land and at one time had only six poverty-stricken families as members. Now it has increased its land to 1,102 hectares**, and the population has grown to 257 households. They have their own water-power, and a repair workshop for the farm machines," he related. "They have a school, a hospital and a nursery. There's a club where they show films and give plays and concerts. The farmers use machinery for everything. They even shear the sheep and milk the cows with machines!"

Machines for milking cows? The villagers only half believed their ears.

"What do they eat? What do they wear?" they asked.

"They eat plenty of meat, eggs and butter. They have fruit, and they drink milk like we drink water. Everyone has leather shoes. The men wear wool suits for best, and the women have silk frocks. Even when I saw them working in the fields I thought the women looked like actresses on the stage, their clothes were so gay.

"Now the chairman of this farm—his name's Dubkovetsky—he has a past very much like yours or mine. He went hungry as a boy, and the landlord's steward used to beat him. Some years after the October Revolution he helped his neighbbours to build up this collective farm. He was 28 years old at that time, about the same age I was when we first started mutual aid. Now he's twenty years or so older than I am. When he told me about his life, I thought: 'In twenty years Hsikou will be like this collective!' Since then I've turned it over in my mind some more. If we use their experience, we'll travel faster. It will be less than twenty years for us!"

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*126 acres.
**2,722 acres

Li Shun-ta spoke at meetings all over the country. His stories of what he had seen and learned in the Soviet Union aroused a new view of the future. In the course of 1953, twenty-one more families joined the Hsikou Cooperative, bringing the number of households up to 47.

THE COOPERATIVE GROWS

IN the winter of 1953-54, Hsikou combined with two larger villages nearby, Nansai and Chihti, to form a single *hsiang*, or township. The Li Shun-ta Cooperative made ready to recruit new members in these two places. It was a big organizational job, but the cooperative committee was sure it could be handled.

All through China at that time, discussions were going on concerning the "General Line". This was the statement in which the Communist Party defined the tasks facing the country now that the period of post-war reconstruction had been completed and the First Five-Year Plan had begun. According to the "General Line", alongside the large-scale building of socialist industry, Chinese agriculture would move toward socialism through cooperatives.

Knowing the policy and prospects, however, was one thing. Putting them into practice was another. In Nansai, for example, the people had already tried to form a cooperative, but due to poor organization it had failed, and they had gone back to mutual-aid teams. In Chihti, the soil was much better than that in Hsikou. The people there thought they could get along just as well without a cooperative.

Some of the original Hsikou co-op members felt a little grudging about opening their doors to new arrivals. "We've won high yields on our land," one said, "and we've accumulated a lot of common property. Now we're asked to share with folk who haven't worked for it. 'Whoever crosses the river first gets his feet wet first,' the proverb says. We older ones fought the battle. Now others will come to enjoy the feast."

The people from Chihti and Nansai, on their part, weren't exactly knocking at the door. If you asked them about joining the co-op, you'd get a response something like this: "Our soil is better than Hsikou's. If we join them, we may taste sweetness for awhile, but later it will turn to bitterness. The first year might bring us benefit, because Hsikou now gets higher yields than we do. But in the second year we'd certainly be even,

and in the third year the Hsikou members would be getting the advantage from us because the yield from our land would be higher."

Li Shun-ta and other members of the co-op committee spent several weeks answering various arguments and the doubts, explaining their idea of how everything would work. Then they called a public meeting. The first speaker, Yang Shu-pei, a member of the county committee of the Communist Party, got right down to the root of things. He started out with a straight comparison between Chihti and Hsikou.

"The soil in Chihti is good," he said. "The soil in Hsikou is poor. No one can deny that. But there's another side. Hsikou has a cooperative but Chihti hasn't. The average yield last harvest in Hsikou was 350 catties per *mou*. Chihti got only 278.

"In Chihti, out of 150 households, 17 don't have any grain to spare and 26 have had to sell some land or animals to keep going. Let's look at Hsikou, which has 52 households now. They haven't sold any animals, they've bought 12 donkeys. They had no sheep before — now they have a big flock. They've added to their land by reclamation. They've built 20 new rooms for their homes."

Then Li Shun-ta spoke. The whole meeting listened intently to what he had to say.

"If we go up the path on this mountain behind us," he began, "we get to the Five Dragon Cave. After that there's nowhere to go except over the precipice, thousands of feet down to the bottom of the chasm. But if we start off the other way and walk along the valley, we come to Pingshun town. From there we can take the bus to Taiyuan. After that we can get a train to Peking. From Peking we can travel to the Soviet Union.

"These are the two paths we've got to choose between. The first is the path to capitalism. The second leads to socialism. All China is taking the socialist road. That's the way the Soviet people took. The further they go on it, the richer they become, and we can do it too. You all know how the peasants there live— you've heard me tell about it over and over again.

"If we take the path to Five Dragon Cave and don't bother about what is happening to the rest of the country, each one will be trying to get rich for himself. Perhaps a few will manage it, hire other people to work for them, and even become landlords. But then what about the rest of us? It'd be the same as it was before, with a few people having more than enough and the rest having too little to eat. Is this what we've been working and fighting for, driving out the Japanese and the Kuomintang, getting rid of the landlords, winning back our own land? The whole Chinese people will never go backwards, even if there are a few who want to.

"Take my experience," Li Shun-ta went on. "When I came here from Honan I was a beggar. I didn't even own one *mou* of land. After the liberation and the land reform my life got steadily better. By 1951 I had 26 *mou* of land. The government had given me three oxen and I'd bought another for myself, along with a horse, two donkeys and about 40 sheep. After each year's work I had enough grain to last nearly two years. We had a new house, and everyone in the family had warm clothes.

"If anyone could, I could have got rich on my own. I could have started hiring people to work for me and lent money at interest to people who needed it. But I've thought it over and I think the other way is better. I've been to Peking and Moscow. I've seen Chairman Mao and the Soviet collective farmers. I know the way the world is going and I know that's the road I want — because it's good for me too. That's why I've invested everything I have in the cooperative."

These words made sense to Li Shun-ta's hearers. They knew that everything he said was true. In the spring of 1954, 156 families in the villages of Chihti and Nansai joined the Li Shun-ta Cooperative. Its name was changed to the Hsikou

Li Shun-ta and Shen Chi-lan, after their election as deputies to the National People's Congress in 1954.

Township Cooperative. Its membership was now 204 households.

To increase production quickly so that the income of both new and old members would be better than before, the cooperative launched an "emulation campaign". It divided its members into production teams and began an inter-team production contest. The purpose was not to let one team get a permanent lead over the others, but to get each team to look for better ways of work which all could learn and use.

PUSHING UP PRODUCTION

THE Chihti production group won the red banner in the first season. Its members had made an important sacrifice to do it. Apart from the land pooled in the cooperative, each family kept a plot on which to grow its own vegetables and anything else it wished. It was the custom to use more manure for this plot than for the others. But the Chihti team members had fertilized the co-op fields more heavily than their home plots, with very good effect on the crops.

When the maize was attacked by an insect pest, women members of the Hsikou production group got technical advice on what insecticide to use. They applied what they had learned in Hsikou, and went around to the other villages to teach the women there. As a result, all the 88 acres of maize planted by the whole cooperative were saved. The women got honourable mention.

Having many more workers than before, the expanded co-op could embark on entirely new schemes. The chief one was to reclaim the denuded valley. Low stone walls, about three feet high, were built there to enclose square plots. This was done before the 1954 summer rains, and channels were made to direct the mountain torrents into the squares. When the water drained away in the autumn, the low walls kept back the silt that had come down with it. A layer of rich soil completely covered the stones. The valley could be made fertile again! Some 12 acres of reclaimed stony waste were planted with wheat that year, producing three times the per-acre yield on the mountainside.

"That's what organization means," said Sung Chin-shan, one of the co-op members. "Not one of us could have done as much in a lifetime, working on his own."

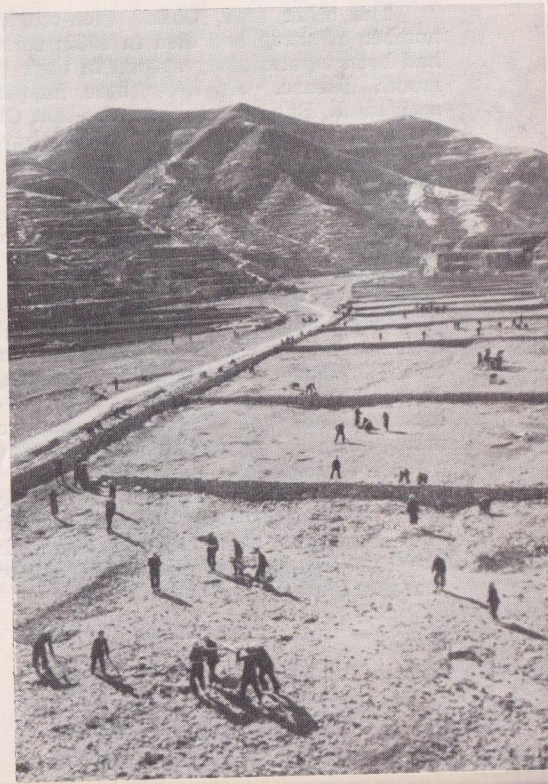
After the harvest, it was found that everyone's income had taken a big jump. Seeing this, practically all the remaining families in the township joined the cooperative, which grew from 203 households to 274. At the end of the year Li Shun-ta was asked to make a broadcast speech to the whole county. He told of how the increase in membership had resulted in higher production per person.

"When three people are of one heart," he said, "they can change the earth to gold. In our cooperative, hundreds are of one heart. That is why we've done things that were impossible before."

The cooperative was re-named once again. It took a proud name: "Gold Star Producers' Cooperative for Agriculture, Forestry and Stock-breeding."

Preparations began for the spring sowing of 1955. During this time, facts came to light which showed that in Hsikou township, as elsewhere in China, counter-revolutionaries had been working to wreck and discredit the cooperative movement.

The culprits were two members of the cooperative who had been in it since shortly after its foundation. They were two close cronies who happened to have the same family name, Chang. Both were fairly well-educated men, smiling and plausible. During the war they had worked for the Kuomintang government, against the liberation forces. But they had later confessed this themselves and, since they appeared to regret their deeds sincerely, had been admitted to the cooperative.



Building new fields in the stony valley. The low stone walls hold the soil carried down by the mountain torrent.

Chang Lai-chuan became the co-op accountant. He took advantage of the fact that most of the peasants could not read or write to cheat them and sow disunity. He pocketed money they had earned and falsified the books to cover his traces. For some he wrote down work-days which they had not earned, and he failed to write down the real work of others, causing envy and resentment. Slyly, he concentrated his attention on the poorer and more backward members. They had no way of keeping records of their earnings themselves, and there was always this smiling, glib accountant to tell them they had figured wrong. On one occasion the wife of a peasant who was away from home came to Chang to get some of her husband's work-day grain. When the husband returned, the accountant told him that his wife had used all he had to his credit and that he was actually in debt to the cooperative. The wife protested. Chang produced his doctored account books as "proof". As neither the man nor his wife could read, they did not make a public protest. The poor woman was so dismayed at her husband's anger that she tried to commit suicide.

The other man, Chang Pien-tse, was a direct saboteur. A number of sheep had died in 1952; some from eating hemp which had been mysteriously spread in their pasture, others of foot and mouth disease. At first these happenings had been taken as accidental. But later it came out that Chang Pien-tse had poisoned them, and it was he too who had purchased diseased sheep for the cooperative. When the teams switched to close-planting of maize, learned from the Soviet Union, it was Chang who wilfully misinterpreted the directions so as to make the crop fail. Afterwards he had made sneering remarks to the more backward members of his team, saying "This is what you get for following the advanced Soviet methods."

The Changs had hidden their tracks very cleverly. It was their attempts to wreck morale that proved their undoing. One of the Hsikou Communists, Ma Yu-hsing, had failed to attend an important production meeting at the county town because his brother-in-law had died and he had gone to see to the funeral arrangements. Chang Pien-tse, who invariably acted the part of a most zealous defender of the co-op's interests, pretended to be indignant. "Ma Yu-hsing is the deputy secretary of the Party branch and deputy head of the cooperative," he said to Li Shun-ta. "Yet he puts his own affairs first and misses an important meeting like this. If he does this, what can we expect of the ordinary peasants?"

And to Ma Yu-hsing, Chang said: "Li Shun-ta was very angry because you stayed away from the meeting. He's going to criticize you severely. You'd better be prepared."

Ma, never a great talker, became very morose. The other Party members could not understand why he had suddenly turned so gloomy and silent. Then some one asked him the reason, and he told them. Inquiries were made among the other co-op members. Gradually, the picture of the Changs' enmity to the co-op came to light. When their activities were looked into, real crimes were discovered. The two men were arrested, given a public trial and sent to prison.

The cooperative learned a big lesson from this. It was summed up by Li Shun-ta, who said, "Our eyes were not clear. It's foolish to suppose that because we've driven the reactionaries from power, we can stop being on the alert. They're still trying to wreck the revolution in underhand ways."

After this affair, the cooperative went forward confidently to the tasks for the rest of 1955. There had been a serious drought that spring. After the sowing there was more than a month without rain. The young shoots had dried up and withered. An emergency meeting of the experienced farmers from the whole township was called to meet the situation.

Because the cooperative had sufficient manpower, it was able to dig 240 irrigation channels to bring water from the mountains, irrigating about 85 acres of land. Some of the drought-stricken fields were sown for the second time. Extra fertilizer, purchased out of the cooperative's emergency funds, was spread on them.

Thanks to these measures, the per-acre average yield of grain was not less than the previous year's; it was more. On an average, every member got 1,195 lb. of grain. This was double the income in 1951, the last year of the mutual-aid team, before the co-op was formed. The pay for each work-day had gone up. In fact, the cooperative had obtained a greater increase in output than in any past year.

CO-OP TO COLLECTIVE

IN 1955, remarkable things began to happen in China's countryside. The formation of agricultural producers' co-ops, which had been proceeding at a fairly even rate, suddenly began to gather speed. Soon it outstripped all calculations. Some leaders and organizers in the countryside—Communist Party members

included—were unprepared for this. They were afraid the growth might be too rapid, too difficult for organization to keep pace with. Plans would have to be scrapped over and over again, they thought. It would be difficult to find and train new leaders. People with such fears tried to hold back the peasants. They might as well have tried to resist a tidal wave.

Chairman Mao Tse-tung, after paying a special visit to the countryside in which he talked to hundreds of peasants and organizers and read work-reports from a great many cooperatives, made a speech before the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In it he said:

> Throughout the Chinese countryside a new upsurge in the socialist mass movement is in sight. But some of our comrades are tottering along like a woman with bound feet, always complaining that others are going too fast. . .
>
> We must guide the movement boldly, not act like one fearing the dragon ahead and the tiger behind. Both the cadres* and peasants will change of themselves as they learn from their own experience in the struggle. Get them into action themselves: they will learn while doing, become more capable, and large numbers of excellent people will come forward.

In the second part of the year, the tidal wave became a mighty flood. In July, the number of peasant families organized in agricultural producers' cooperatives had been just short of 17 million. By the end of December, it was over 70 million—more than three-fifths of all the peasant households in China. It had been estimated that only one-third of all peasant households would be in cooperatives by the end of China's first Five-Year Plan in 1957. Now, it was clear, the *whole* countryside would be cooperative by the end of 1956.

As for established co-ops, they were already thinking of the next stage. In the semi-socialist cooperative, the land was privately owned and pooled as shares carrying a yearly dividend. They were making ready to change to socialist cooperatives (collective farms) in which everyone is paid according to his work and the land becomes group property.

The Gold Star Cooperative of Hsikou township discussed Chairman Mao's report with keen interest. It decided — in keeping with its leading role thus far—to change over to the "socialist-type" cooperative.

*Leaders and organizers.

Up to that time, its land and most of the draught animals and larger farm implements had been used in common but still privately owned. Forty per cent of the cooperative's total income had been paid out in land dividends or as hire for animals and tools. The rest, after investments in production and payments into reserve and welfare funds, was shared among the members on the basis of how many days' work each had contributed.

Four-fifths of the co-op's members depended mainly on work for their earnings. Public opinion, therefore, was strongly for the change. Here are the reasons:

First, under the old system, the minority that owned more land or other means of production could work less but still live better than the rest. Those with less land had to work harder. But their enthusiasm was damped by the knowledge that part of the proceeds went to pay rent and dividends to those who were richer. So they didn't work with all their hearts, and this held back the advance of production.

Seconly, the private ownership of animals was another hindrance to planning. The owners could, and sometimes did, use the animals for their own business instead of the co-op's. This often happened at times inconvenient to the work programme. Much energy had to be spent in negotiations and arguments instead of real work.

Thirdly, private ownership of land and animals made it hard for the co-op to make long-term plans for changes in crops, tree-planting and livestock-breeding. Not everyone would agree that their land should be used for the purpose that served the common interest best.

It is clear that those who had less private property were eager to remove these obstacles. But what of the minority, who still profited from owning more than their neighbours?

A few of them held back, loth to lose their cherished property. So did a few who did not own so much, but were old, weak or disabled. They were afraid that they could not earn enough by the light work they were capable of doing, and would have nothing to fall back on when their land dividend was gone.

A discussion was set afoot to clear up these doubts. The peasants worked out very carefully the potentialities for 1956, if the cooperative should become socialist. In that year, they estimated, they could restore another 25 acres of the stony valley to cultivation and keep 300 more pigs, 300 more sheep and 60

Niu Tsun-tse, a well-to-do middle peasant, speaks at the inauguration of the collective farm.

more head of cattle. The total income of the cooperative from agriculture, forestry, livestock-breeding and sidelines such as keeping hens and bees and milling wheat, would reach the equivalent of 300 tons of grain — one third more than in 1955. Each member, on the average, would get 1,500 lb. of grain — a quarter more than in 1955. Everyone putting in a work-day would earn 16 lb., as compared with 10 lb. the previous year. These results could be attained if every man in the co-op did no more than 260 work-days during the year, and every woman 65 work-days.

This was common sense for the better-off as well as the majority. Such a start, with the possibility of going forward even more quickly in coming years, meant a brighter future for them too.

The reasoning of one such man, Niu Tsun-tse, is typical. Like Li Shun-ta, he had come to Hsikou from Honan province. He had spent all his youth as a hired hand. Only after the liberation and the land reform did he get a house and land of his own —for the first time in his life. After he joined the mutual-aid team, his living had improved. In the semi-socialist co-op he had become what was called a "new middle peasant", somewhat more prosperous than a number of others. He had been able to buy animals and farm tools, and even some additional land.

In 1955, over and above his work income, Niu earned 71 yuan simply by hiring out his cow and donkey to do ploughing for the cooperative. He had also sold 2,000 lb. of surplus grain and put

money in the credit cooperative. Of the 68 lb. of wheat flour he got from the co-op, he had sent 55 to his parents as a New Year gift, because his own needs had already been taken care of.

When Niu heard about the proposed transition to a collective, his first thought was of his new property. His cow and donkey, once he had sold them to the co-op, could earn no more money for him. His land would bring him no more dividends. If he got paid for work only, he feared, his income would decrease.

But when the tentative estimation for 1956 came out, he sat down and figured things out. If he and his wife put in only 400 work-days between them—and they were capable of doing more than that — they could get about 3 tons of grain. This was half as much again as their income in 1955, dividends, animal-hire and all.

With Niu, there was more to it than this. He was drawn by the socialist future. "I am looked upon as well-to-do here," he said when he told his friends of his decision. "But if our cooperative stays as it is, I'll never have what Shun-ta says the Soviet farmers have, even in 50 years. Besides, being in the collective will help me right away. My house is a long way from the village. I want to build a new one somewhere near the school so that my daughter can go there when she is seven. With the money I get from the sale of my animals and tools to the collective and what I can save in the next three or four years, I can do it!"

The old people and those with less labour-power reached similar conclusions. An aged widow, known to all the villagers as "Third Grandma", brought her worries to the co-op leaders. When she came out she said: "I was anxious to stick to my bit of land for a living. Now I see that I can live better without it. If I feed 80 pigs for the co-op, I can earn about 100 work-days a year. I'll have more grain than I need, and I can depend on the collective to take care of me till the day of my death."

The bright vision of the future that had inspired Li Shun-ta ever since the day he joined the Communist Party, the vista that the Party, in all its work, tried to open to the people, became clear and real to the Hsikou peasants, as to the peasants all over China. They were no longer content to stay still. At first they had been too poor to dream, unable to imagine that life could improve on their mountainside. When things got a little better, they had thought themselves lucky, afraid to step further forward lest they should lose the little they had won. But now they could see the path ahead, with its promise of golden harvests, and were confident that they could go forward along it together.

On December 24, 1955, the Gold Star Cooperative became socialist. Never before had Hsikou seen such a huge crowd as that which gathered in the square in front of the headquarters of the township government. Never had the people been in such high spirits. Bright-coloured silk banners hung from the platform. Slogans were pasted on the walls. The children sat on the ground in the front, the grown-ups behind them, talking and laughing. All wore their best clothes.

Attending the meeting were about 600 people, including the 30 household in the small neighbouring cooperative called *The Dawn*, and nine individual farmers with their families. All of them joined the Gold Star Cooperative in its new socialist form, which now embraced every single household in Hsikou township. About a hundred peasants from other nearby co-ops came to the ceremony.

Thunderous applause greeted Li Shun-ta as he mounted the platform to speak. He stood smiling, clapping his hands with the rest, until there was silence.

He began by reminding them of the achievements of the cooperative in the four years since it was founded. Then, once again, he described what was meant by a socialist co-op. He compared it to the collective farms in the Soviet Union. The taking of this step, he explained, meant that never again would the few live off the labour of the many.

"After today," he said, "there will be no limit to our strength. We have 281 households. Think how many work-days we can put in each year! We can achieve anything we want. We'll plant high-value oil-bearing crops in the valley that was once all stones. Next autumn, we can make our Golden Queen maize yield a thousand catties a *mou*.*

"These things aren't going to fall from the sky. They won't spring from the ground; we have to work for them. But we have the leadership of the Communist Party and Chairman Mao. We have the example and help of the Soviet Union. We have the cooperative and each of us has two hands, so nothing will be impossible for us."

Next to speak was Li Lin, the young secretary of the Communist Party in Pingshun County.

"Many of you can remember the meeting we had in 1950 to celebrate the achievements of the Li Shun-ta mutual-aid team,"

*A *mou* is a sixth of an acre.

he said. "At that time we were cheering because 19 out of 20 households in Hsikou had some surplus grain. Today, as we meet to celebrate this new step forward, the average income of every household is twice what it was then. According to our long-range programme, it will be 3½ tons or more twelve years from now.

"You old men with long beards, have you ever thought how you could spend the price of three tons of grain? Fix up your homes, comrades, because electric light will be installed here soon. The railway will come to Hsikou station. We shall have apples to give our guests when they come from Peking.

"All these things are going to come true. The cooperative movement is developing fast all over the country. We at Hsikou have been in the lead for a long time. But now we'll have to move fast to keep pace with the other places."

After he had finished, other peasants came to the platform. They spoke about their past lives and their confidence in the future, welcoming the new step towards socialism and paying tribute to "Old Li", as everyone called Li Shun-ta, for his leadership. Though Li Shun-ta had become a national hero and his name was a household word, his relation with his fellow villagers was the same as ever—simple, equal and warm. When the peasants, by secret ballot, elected a committee of fifteen to run the new socialist collective, Li Shun-ta's name headed the list.

This was because he had never forgotten the admonition the Party had put on a congratulatory banner many years before, when he had first been elected a local labour hero:

As the red flower is joined to the green leaf.
So the hero must be one with the people.

That night after supper, a concert was given by a folk orchestra, and dancing and singing went on far into the night. A kerosene lamp lighted up the stage and a bright moon illuminated the faces of the rejoicing people. They decided to celebrate December 24 as the Day of Socialism in Hsikou village every year.

POSTSCRIPT

The author of this pamphlet stayed in Hsikou village for a month or so after the new socialist collective was formed. She witnessed the tremendous release of energy that followed.

In past winters, most of the peasants had spent January and February, when the ground was frozen and nothing could be

done outside, sitting cross-legged on their brick beds, smoking and dozing. In the winter of 1955-56, despite the extreme cold, they besieged the management committee asking for work to do.

The strongest of the men were organized to carry stones and build more walls to enclose new fields in the valley, making them ready for the time when the summer torrents would fill them with silt. But so impatient were the work-teams to see them covered with soil that they began to bring earth from the mountainsides, without waiting for the rains.

Meanwhile, a Youth Brigade got to work digging channels to guide the water down into the new fields. They also sank wells for irrigation.

The old people were just as enthusiastic. Sixty-five-year-old Auntie Wang Chao-ken sold her donkey to the collective, saying: "I used to have one animal, now I've got a whole herd." Soon afterwards she went across the mountain to attend the wedding of

the daughter of an old friend. She returned late in the evening, but insisted on gathering a full basket of sheep-manure on her way back. Nobody wanted to spend a single day without doing some kind of work for the common good.

There was a marked difference between the number of work-days contributed that winter, and those in the semi-socialist co-operative the year before. Out of the 269 able-bodied men in the cooperative, only six did no work the first month, and the reason in every case was illness. The previous winter, only 134 had turned out to work. In January 1956, thrice as many women did winter jobs for the co-op as in the same month in 1955.

The results surprised the peasants themselves. Before the end of January, they had turned 20 acres of stony valley into new fields—more than in all the previous four years. They made 13 caves in the hillside for stables, sank 22 wells, spread fertilizer on 50 acres of land and gathered over 11,000 lb. of firewood.

The management committee realized that their plans had been too conservative, that they must break out of their ways of thinking. Accordingly, four important steps were taken:

Five work-teams were organized, with 23 sub-groups under them. Twenty members were made specially responsible for tree-planting and livestock-breeding. This put an end to the confusion arising from constant re-allocation of work.

All the cooperative members were asked to think of new things to do. So many people were clamouring for work that the committee could not think up jobs for them. Many suggestions were received for ways of helping to increase production—pruning the fir and pine trees on the slopes, making compost heaps and so on.

The distribution of work was planned so that people did jobs nearer their homes instead of walking miles from one place to the next.

A special group was formed to devise a scientific method of recording the work done, giving the proper weight to all factors: quality, quantity and time. It was decided what constituted a work-day (the unit of payment) for each kind of job.

The peasants and the leaders they had elected were still inexperienced in running a collective farm. But they already showed that they were capable of meeting each new situation as it arose.

←« **Co-op members bring horses, mules and donkeys to a village show preparatory to selling them to the collective farm.**

CHINA RECONSTRUCTS AND ITS SUPPLEMENTS

CHINA RECONSTRUCTS, to which this booklet is a supplement, is an illustrated monthly magazine chronicling China's progress in the economic, social and cultural fields. It also presents special features including trade news, a Chinese language lesson, answers to readers' questions, a women's corner, stamp column and songs with music.

SPECIAL SUPPLEMENTS are a regular feature of *China Reconstructs*. "A Village Moves to Socialism" is the third and last supplement in 1956. Three supplements are scheduled for 1957.

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